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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a simulation in which students pretend to follow a favorite baseball team on the road and travel to major league baseball cities in North America. Students use the encyclopedia to answer questions about each city they "visit" and then report on what they have learned by designing a postcard to send back to the class. The activities are suitable for most student at the third through fifth grade levels and can be used to motivate students of both genders. Procedures and instructions, a time frame, and a listing of materials and resources are included. (EH)

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BASEBALL GEOGRAPHY

ED 406 304

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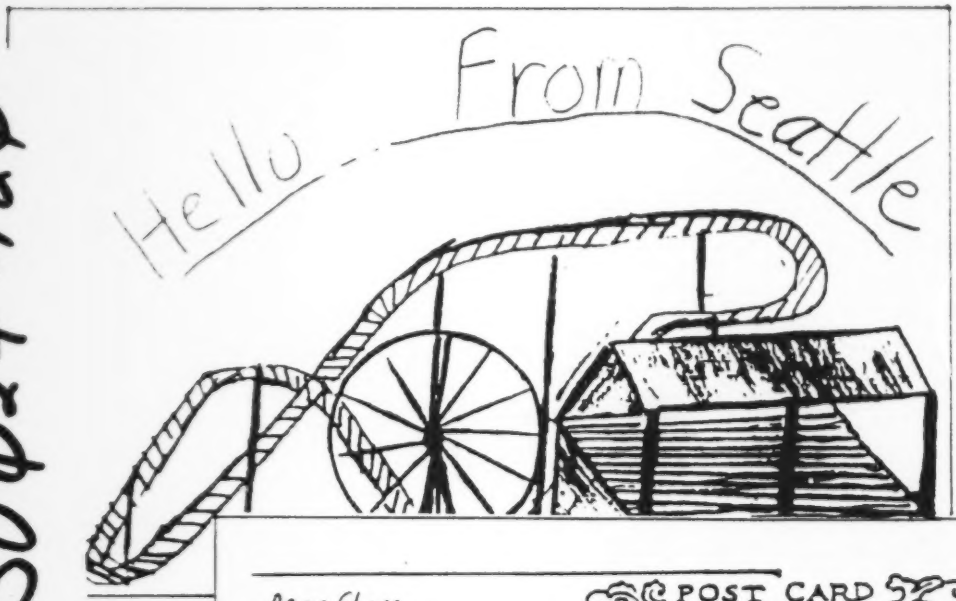

POST CARD

Dear Class,

I'm having a great time in Seattle. The people here ride bicycles! Seattle has a lot of hills but they washed them into Elliot Bay so they could build on the land. Seattle had a world's Fair in 19--. It was called Century 21.

From

Curtis

ADDRESS

Fourth Grade
Blue Hill Consolidated
PO Box 837
Blue Hill, Maine 04614

Project SEED

Baseball Geography simulates traveling to major league baseball cities in North America as students pretend to follow a favorite team on the road. Students use the World Book encyclopedia to answer questions about each city they "visit", then report on what they have learned by designing a postcard to send back to the class. The highly motivating theme of this unit--baseball--and the novelty of the task--to make a set of postcards--combine to capture students' enthusiasm while they are learning basic skills and knowledge.

Participants. Participants have in the past been fourth graders, although the activities are suitable for most students at the third through fifth grade levels. The baseball connection has proven to be a highly effective motivator for students of both genders. However, any pretense for an imaginary tour of major American cities could serve as the basis for this unit with virtually no adaptation. The classroom teacher coordinates this unit.

Objectives: Baseball Geography addresses three objectives. First, we introduce students to the use of the encyclopedia and give them an opportunity to develop proficiency in using it as a resource for information. Second, we assist students in developing standards for self-assessment of their work product. Students take pride in work that measures up to standards of quality they have set for themselves. Finally, this unit provides a context for learning

North American geography.

Procedures and Instructions. Our unit begins with a whole-class visit to Boston. Students receive a "ticket" (similar to the ones they will subsequently use for each city they visit) which contains five specific questions about Boston. With the aid of the overhead projector, we explore the textual format of the World Book encyclopedia, learning to use sub-headings, pictures, captions, tables, and maps to help us find the answers to the questions on the ticket.

After completing research, students begin work on their first polstcard. The messages they compose are revised and edited according to our standard writing process procedures and must incorporate at least three facts they learned about the city. We introduce conventional formal standards for writing and addressing letters, and students copy their final drafts onto a 5 1/2" x 8" form designed as a blank postcard. The next and equally important step is to design an illustration for the reverse side of the postcard that announces the identity of the city it was mailed from. Using colored pencils, crayons, or markers, students strive to communicate this information using primarily non-verbal, visual clues based on what a visitor to the city would observe there. To finish the postcard, picture and message are glued back to back, then laminated.

Once finished, this first batch of postcards is displayed for a class discussion about assessment. We commend the

postcards that most successfully met the criteria for the assignment, and we discuss other factors that distinguish the best postcards. Students themselves articulate the standards they will use to assess their work for the remainder of the unit.

After this point, students work at their own pace to produce a minimum of four additional postcards. We generally encourage them to research the ticket questions with a partner, then work individually to produce their postcards. Each student's set of postcards is ultimately assessed by both student and teacher according to the criteria for assessment that the class itself developed at the outset of the project.

Time Frame. Introductory whole-group activities take three to five 40 minute periods. Thereafter students work at their own pace during our regular daily writing periods (about 40 minutes) for about two weeks. There's lots of room for flexibility to develop a time frame that best suits the schedule of your own classroom.

Materials and Resources Needed to Replicate this Unit. For those wishing to adapt Baseball Geography to their own classrooms, we can provide a set of the tickets we use which contain the questions about the 12 American League baseball cities on our tour, as well as the form for making postcards. A set of World Book encyclopedias is the only other essential resource. No materials are required beyond standard

classroom art supplies, although laminating the finished postcards enhances the authentic appearance of the final product.

We have also found it helpful to compile packets of additional information about each city--*National Geographic* articles, books, brochures, etc.--for students to look through as part of their visits. Vera Williams' picture book *Stringbean's Trip to the Shining Sea* contains many ideas for postcard designs and also models the way students might attempt to develop a continuing story line to add interest to their postcard messages.

Expenses. Assuming you have a set of the World Book, access to a photocopying machine, and a stock of standard classroom supplies on hand, there are no expenses associated with this unit.

Conclusion. Students in the intermediate grades depend increasingly on the encyclopedia as a primary resource for independent research activities; but penetrating its small print, dense text, and sophisticated tone sometimes proves frustrating to 10-year olds. Motivated by the underlying sports connection of Baseball Geography, however, students receive a thorough introduction to this valuable resource and then plenty of guided practice in how to use it. At the same time they learn fundamental geographical information about the cities, states, and provinces of North America.

We have found, too, that Baseball Geography particularly succeeds in motivating students to take pride in the quality of their work product. Students assess both the written messages and the artwork for their postcards in accordance with standards of content, form, and neatness that they themselves have helped to articulate. Our students treasure their collections of postcards as authentic evidence of their academic achievement.